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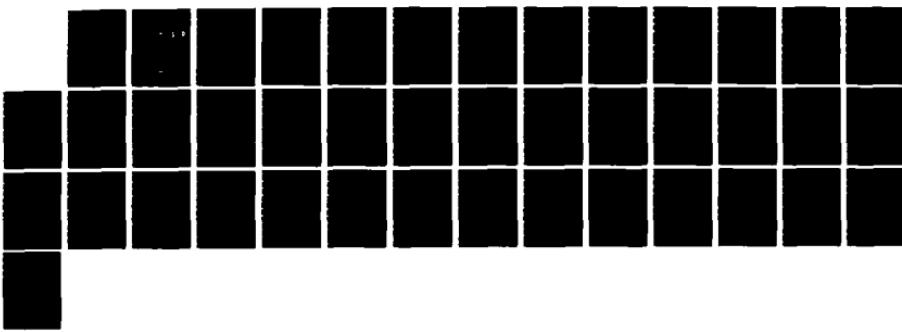
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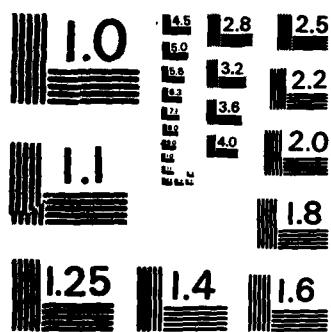
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STUDENT REPORT

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD
THE GULF AFTER KHOMEINI

MAJ WAYNE A. NISSEN

86-1865

"insights into tomorrow"

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TITLE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE GULF
AFTER KHOMEINI

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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PREFACE

Until the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution, Iran was considered a close friend of the United States and viewed as an important actor in helping to protect Western interests in the Persian Gulf region. With the fall of the Shah came a change in Iran's form of government from dynastic rule to one by Iran's Islamic clergy. Headed by Iran's most powerful spiritual leader, Ruhullah al-Musavi al-Khomeini, the new government views the United States as its principal enemy and has also adopted a revolutionary ideology it believes duty bound to impose on the Gulf Arab regimes. This study looks at the nature of Iran's approach to Gulf foreign policy and, more important, at how it may change, if at all, after Khomeini.

I wish to express my appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Lewis Ware, of the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education (CADRE), for his time and effort in providing advice and guidance on this study. I would also like to thank LTC Al Baldwin, of the Air Command & Staff College Faculty, for his comments and assistance in proofreading.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Wayne A. Nissen was commissioned in the Infantry through the Army ROTC program at Colorado State University in 1973. During the period 1974-1978, he served as a platoon leader, company executive officer, assistant S-3, and company commander while stationed at Fort Carson. Major Nissen then entered the Army's Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program and received an MA in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1980; conducted an independent Middle East study program for a year in Morocco; and completed a three-year assignment in 1985 as a Middle East FAO for the US Army Intelligence and Threat Analysis Center, Special Research Detachment, at Fort Meade. Major Nissen is also a 1983 distinguished graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
About the Author.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	vi
Executive Summary.....	vii
Glossary.....	ix
 CHAPTER ONE--INTRODUCTION.....	1
 CHAPTER TWO--IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE SHAH AND KHOMEINI	
Historic Concerns.....	3
Iran's Role in the Gulf.....	4
Conclusions.....	7
 CHAPTER THREE--IRANIAN ELITE GROUPS AND FOREIGN POLICY	
Elites in Iran.....	9
Succession to Khomeini and Policy Goals.....	12
Conclusions.....	13
 CHAPTER FOUR--CONSTRAINTS ON IRAN'S POLICY IN THE GULF	
Iranian Political and Economic Constraints.....	15
External Policy Constraints.....	17
Conclusions.....	19
 CHAPTER FIVE--IMPLICATIONS OF IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE GULF AND CONCLUSIONS	
Implications for the Gulf States.....	21
Implications for the United States.....	22
Conclusions.....	22
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	25

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

FIGURE 1--Area Orientation Map: Persian Gulf Region..... x



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REPORT NUMBER 86-1865

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR WAYNE A. NISSEN, USA

TITLE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE PERSIAN GULF
AFTER KHOMEINI

I. Purpose: To examine the nature of Iranian foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf region after Khomeini.

II. Problem: As a result of the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution, a former friendly government of the United States now views the US as its principal enemy and has adopted a revolutionary ideology it believes duty bound to impose on the Gulf Arab regimes. Rule in Iran changed from a monarchy to rule by Iran's clergy--for the first time in its history. The Islamic Republic's principles were formed under the guidance of its most powerful spiritual leader, Ruhullah al-Musavi al-Khomeini. What is unknown is how Iran's foreign policy will change, if at all, after the 83-year-old Khomeini dies. It is not clear if the new government will share Khomeini's strong ideological views or even if the clergy will retain power.

III. Data: Military and political conflict between Arabs and Iranians is centuries old. The Persian Empire controlled most of the Middle East until a period of decline that ended by Moslem Arab conquest in the seventh century. In 1501, Shah Isma'il proclaimed Shi'a Islam as Iran's state religion, and religious differences were used as a nationalistic means to unite Iran in the goal of restoring Iran's former territories. Throughout its history, the appearance of a strong ruler resulted in the consolidation of Iran's territorial integrity and enabled Iran to assert its influence in the region. The Shah used Iran's oil wealth (and the political and military support supplied by the United States) to assert Iranian power and influence in the

CONTINUED

Gulf region--which also protected Western interests after Great Britain announced that by 1971 it would withdraw from the region. The Shah's policy was aggressive in that he occupied islands belonging to the United Arab Emirates and tried to acquire Bahrain at its independence. Iran, as an Islamic republic, has also had an aggressive foreign policy toward the Gulf region, but it is now based on an ideology to see Iranian-styled Islamist government imposed on the Gulf Arab regimes. Its 1979 constitution states Iran is duty bound to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world into a single Muslim nation. Trying to predict if Iran will continue its present foreign policy goals after Khomeini is difficult because the Iranian clergy has no past record which would indicate how they approach government rule and foreign policy. The clergy has traditionally been an Iranian elite group, but until 1979, Iran was ruled by an elite which revolved around the royal family and the military. The clergy is comprised of three political factions (extremists, moderates, and pragmatists) which have different ideological views toward foreign policy implementation. Khomeini, the majority of those in government, and the major contenders for power after Khomeini (to include heir apparent Hosain Ali Montazeri) are part of the political extremist faction. As a result, Iran's involvement in the 1981 Bahrain coup attempt, attacks on Kuwait, continuation of the war with Iraq, and support to "liberation groups" are indications of extremist policies. Members of the clergy who support Khomeini and his ideological principles will most likely retain power but they will face internal and external constraints. The most serious constraint on Iranian foreign policy may be if the clergy can not unite behind a single strong leader since a clergy coalition government is more likely to be distracted by trying to prevent factional conflict.

IV. Conclusions: The Iranian Revolution created regional instability for the Gulf states and the United States. The Islamic Republic has changed the nature of traditional regional conflict between Iran and the Gulf Arabs to an ideologically based desire to unite all Muslim peoples into an Iranian-styled Islamic government. As a result, Iran advocates export of its revolution to the rest of the Muslim world as the linchpin of Iranian foreign policy. The clergy elite will most likely retain power after Khomeini, and Iran will be ruled by Montazeri or a collective leadership of individuals who support Khomeini's extremist policies. Unless Iran is contained by internal or external means, it will continue to exploit its perceived position of power and influence in the Persian Gulf region.

GLOSSARY

Achaemenid: the dynasty that ruled Iran between 550-330 B.C.

ayatollah: lit. "sign of God," a title conferred by his followers upon a distinguished muftahid.

faqih: a Muslim jurisprudent.

fatwa (fatva): an authoritative opinion issued by a mujtahid on a matter of law.

imam: one of 12 preternatural souls who descended from the Prophet through his cousin, Ali, the first in line. Considered the "proofs of God," their outstanding piety, knowledge, and chastity are said to enable them to transmit God's light to believers.

Majlis: the Iranian parliament; a council.

mujtahid: a Shi'a clergyman who, by dint of his eminence in learning, may issue authoritative opinions in matters of Islamic law.

mullah (mulla): a lower-ranking clergyman, typically a preacher; also a generic term signifying a clergyman.

Pahlavi: the dynasty that ruled Iran between 1925-1979.

Safvids: the dynasty that ruled Iran between 1501-1722.

Sassanian: the dynasty that ruled Iran between 226-641.

Shi'a (Shi'ah): the partisans of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet.

Sunna (Sunnah): the tradition of the Prophet's behavior and practice.

Sunni: of or pertaining to the orthodox branch of Islam, based on the principle of electing the successor to the Prophet.

ulama: the learned men of the religious law of Islam.

valayat: allegiance to the rule of the imams; their rule on the basis of their ability to interpret the holy law, especially its esoteric meanings.

(2:ix-xiii)

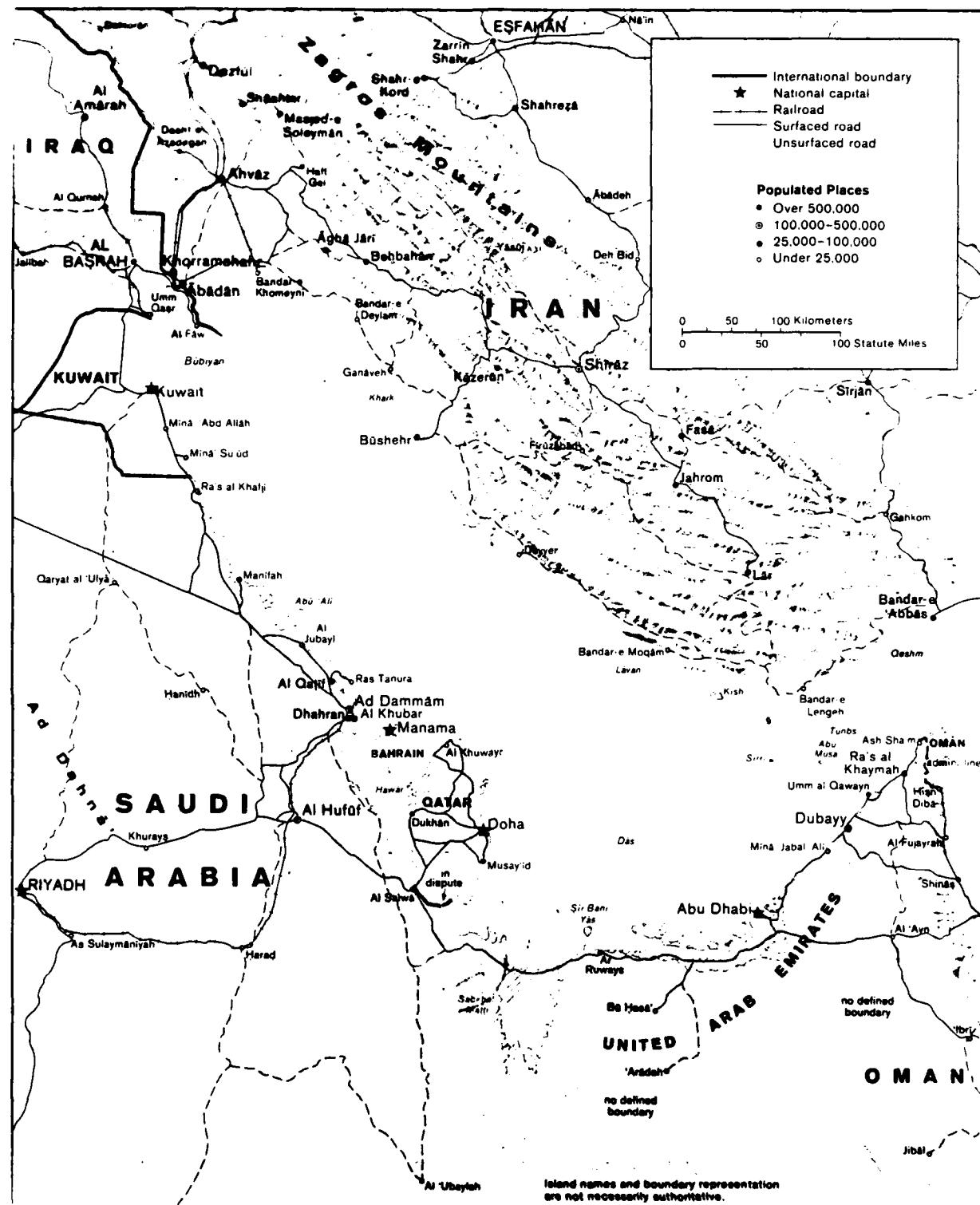


FIGURE 1. Area Orientation Map: Persian Gulf Region

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The 1978-79 Iranian Revolution resulted in the fall of the Shah and the end of dynastic rule. The Iranian clergy directed the 30 March 1979 referendum in favor of the Islamic Republic and Iran's most powerful spiritual leader, Ruhullah al-Musavi al-Khomeini, was named Iran's leader (2:171).

Khomeini brought to government his thoughts of what Islamist government should be. Prior to the revolution, Iran's religious leaders generally accepted the role and authority of secular institutions and government. They opposed the monarchy only on specific issues (such as un-Islamic laws and decisions), but not on the principle of rule (4:32). Khomeini and his supporters regard religious authority as the primary one and the state only as its instrument. He believes it is necessary that the government be Islamic and the leadership religious (4:33). Khomeini also dismisses the manifestations of Western culture as irrelevant and useless to Islam--and as a result, the state. He respects Iran's need for Western technology, but does not want its absorption accompanied by outside Western values (6:75). Iran under Khomeini, and the Iranian goal to spread its revolution to the Gulf Arab regimes, has caused instability for the region and for United States' interests.

Khomeini was born in Iran on 24 September 1902 (17:13), and for several years has been considered in frail health. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of Iranian foreign policy after Khomeini's death. The scope of the study is limited to Iranian foreign policy in the Persian Gulf region.

Chapter Two provides a historical background to Iranian interests and policy goals in the Gulf region. Iran's active participation in Gulf affairs is centuries old. Iranian involvement has also been active in modern times--as evidenced by the policies under the Shah and Khomeini. Included in this chapter are similarities and differences in Iran's perceived role toward the Gulf region, as a monarchy and an Islamic republic.

Chapter Three looks at Iranian elite groups, and specifically at the clergy elite, as the most likely group to retain power. The clergy is divided, however, on many issues of government and society, to include what Iran's role in the Gulf should be. Although Khomeini's successor has been named, it is not clear if Iran will have a smooth transition of power or if there will be violent factional conflict. The study treats the area of foreign policy as a function of the government's elites to formulate and implement. The major clergy elite factions, principal members, and ideological views toward the area of Gulf foreign policy are provided. The

chapter concludes with an analysis of which faction is more likely to succeed Khomeini and its related policy goals.

Chapter Four is an analysis of internal and external constraints of Iran's role in the Gulf. Iran faces several political and economic constraints which could influence and limit Iranian policy for Khomeini's successor. Iran also faces several related and overlapping external constraints, such as Iranian-Arab relations, the Iran-Iraq War, Gulf oil export, intra-Arab relations, and United States' policy.

Lastly, Chapter Five provides an analysis and conclusions of the implications of Iran's Gulf policy. Iranian policy goals and the potential constraints on policy implementation will ultimately impact on the Gulf states and the United States. If history continues to repeat itself, Iran's successor regime will continue to play an active role in the Persian Gulf region.

Chapter Two

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE SHAH AND KHOMEINI

HISTORIC CONCERNs

Military and political conflict between Arabs and Iranians is centuries old. As a result of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences, Arab-Iranian relations have ranged from war to, at best, coexistence. In addition, modern nationalism has tended to intensify power rivalry and aggravated traditional attitudes of mutual mistrust (20:34). As a result, religious, demographic, and geographic conflicts continue today.

Under the strong leadership of Cyrus II and Darius I, the Persian Empire reached its height during the Achaemenid Dynasty (500-330 B.C.). It stretched from present day Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (9:12). Weak rulers, however, led to Persia's decline and its conquest by Alexander the Great in 334 B.C. (9:13). Contemporary Iranians continue to refer to the Achaemenid period as one in which the Persian Gulf was turned into the "Persian Sea" (20:9). In addition, they also refer to the Sassanian Dynasty (226-641) as a period when the Gulf's Arab shore was frequently raided and Bahrain was conquered by King Ardeshir in the early third century (20:10). Bahrain was held by Persia until the empire as a whole fell to the Arabs in the seventh century (20:10).

By the year 651, some 35,000-40,000 Moslem Arabs had taken part in the conquest of Persia. It was not until the end of the eighth century, however, that Islam was accepted by a majority of Iranians. The split between Arab and Iranian practice of Islam started in 661 with the death of Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, the fourth caliph (16:3-9). The majority of Muslims recognized the elected Umayyad Caliphate (661-749), which was empowered to spread Islam by following the practice (or sunna) of the Prophet. Those that believed the caliphate should be based on charismatic leadership of the male descendants of Ali were called Shi'a (16:4-5). Prior to 1501, there were many Islamic sects in Iran. Some cities had a Shi'a majority but the majority of Iran's Muslims were Sunni (9:28; 16:9). The situation changed, however, when Shah Isma'il seized power in 1501 and proclaimed Shi'a Islam as the state religion.

With the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1732) came a campaign of conversion to Shi'a Islam and the conquest of territories in an attempt to restore Iran's pre-Islamic frontiers of the Sassanians (20:10). Isma'il's campaign to convert Iran to Shi'a Islam was a means to give Iran ideological distinction and a nation state identity in confronting its principal (Sunni) military-political enemy, the Ottoman Empire (16:12). Armed conflict between Iran and

Turkey continued until the two Muslim states signed the 1639 Treaty of Peace and Frontiers (20:11). Iran also faced a Portuguese challenge which started in 1507 when Portugal sent an expedition into the Gulf to control the Strait of Hormuz. Shah Abbas the Great regained Hormuz (prior to the treaty with Turkey) but was still faced with the presence of a strong Portuguese navy. Since the Portuguese fleet also threatened British interests in the region, Iran and Great Britain formed an alliance. A joint land and sea offensive resulted in the destruction of the Portuguese fleet in 1622. The victory marked the first successful reassertion of Iranian power in the Persian Gulf in modern times (20:12).

Iranian border disputes with some of its neighbors continue today. The final settlement of the boundary between Iran and Turkey was not settled until 1934. Iraq inherited part of this boundary problem as a successor of the Ottoman Empire. A boundary treaty was concluded between Iran and Iraq in 1937 (most importantly to delineate the boundary along the Shatt al-Arab waterway), but Iraq later claimed the treaty was concluded under British pressure. A March 1975 agreement between Saddam Hussein and the Shah was supposed to finally end this dispute, as part of a broader settlement ending support to secessionist elements in both countries (7:51-56). But Iraq's continued concern over control of the Shatt al-Arab heightened after the Shah fell from power--and it contributed to the start of the Iran-Iraq War. Iran's remaining boundaries with the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are also areas for possible conflict as a result of Iranian support to Afghan refugees along their common borders. Thus, Iran's interests and role in the Persian Gulf are by no means a twentieth century phenomenon, but one that is centuries old.

IRAN'S ROLE IN THE GULF

Iran's role in the Gulf has most often depended on the character of the ruler in power (20:12). Throughout its history, the appearance of a strong ruler resulted in the consolidation of Iran's territorial integrity and enabled Iran to assert its influence into the region. Conversely, Iran lost its territorial integrity, political independence, and power position under weak rulers to Afghan, Turkish, and Russian occupations (20:12). Although the Shah's and Khomeini's ideologies are different, the goals for Gulf predominance are much the same. The Shah had an imperial view of Iran and tried to reclaim former territories by political and military means. On the other hand, Khomeini has applied an Islamic ideology as a rationale for continued Iranian hegemony in the Gulf.

The Shah And The Persian Gulf

Over the last 30 years, the simultaneous emergence of Arab and Iranian nationalism focused on the Persian Gulf, both with expansionist and irredentist tendencies (35:69). For example, Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser envisioned a "united Arab nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf," while the Shah looked to restoring Iran's historic rights in the Gulf, including those vis-a-vis Bahrain (35:68). Thus, the Shah's imperial policy was no less extensive in its scope than the Arabs'.

The Shah's aspirations to renew Iran's historic greatness increased Iranian interest and activity in the Gulf region during the 1960's. At least four factors contributed to this. First, Iraq's 1958 revolution destroyed the Hashemite monarchy and Iraq began to increase competition with Iran for influence in the Gulf. Second, rapprochement with the Soviet Union in 1962 permitted Iran to concentrate on the Gulf. Third, exploitation of offshore oilfields in the Gulf and the construction of facilities at Kharg Island increased Iran's economic interests. Lastly, Great Britain announced that by 1971 it would withdraw from the region (1:74-75). This last event created a power vacuum the Shah was quite willing to fill.

During a December 1968 visit to Washington, Iran's Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda stressed his country's need for arms so that Iran could assume its perceived responsibility to preserve peace in the region. He said that Iran, "accepted these obligations willingly in the firm conviction that we possess the indubitable right, the economic capacity, and the political stability to do so" (1:75). The Shah's aspirations coincided with the Nixon administration's view that the United States should assist local states in assuming responsibility for their own regional defense. Articulated in Guam in 1968 (and later in the Nixon Doctrine), the US saw Iran as the principal power to assist in assuring stability in the Persian Gulf. The Nixon Doctrine was implemented in the Gulf as the "twin pillar" policy, which relied on Iran and Saudi Arabia as the regional guarantors to assure the flow of oil to the West. This led to a US agreement to sell Iran substantial amounts of its most sophisticated military equipment until 1978. By the early 1970's, Iran had an impressive quantitative and qualitative edge in military power over the other two major Gulf powers--Iraq and Saudi Arabia (18:19). The Shah's perception as the sole guardian and policeman in the Gulf placed Iran at odds with several of its neighbors and served as the basis for an active policy.

Prior to Bahrain's independence in 1971, the Iranian government claimed Bahrain as part of ancient Persia. Although Iranian rule ended centuries earlier, the Shah made a strong diplomatic effort to annex Bahrain--which lacked United Nations' support and attracted Arab opposition. Iran also strained relations with the Gulf Arabs when it used force to occupy the islands of Abu Musa and the two Tunbs in November 1971. The islands belonged to the United Arab Emirates, but Iran based its claim on historical grounds and their strategic location for maintaining regional security (1:89). Iraq in particular viewed the occupation as proof of Iran's hegemony aspirations in the Gulf.

Iraq and Iran were in fact the two principal competitors for Gulf leadership since the late 1960's. Military competition between Iran and the Soviet-backed Iraqi regime (in addition to territorial disputes throughout the twentieth century) provided long-term resentment between the two countries. For example, Iran's intervention in the Dhofar rebellion against the government of Oman was criticized by Iraq. The Omani government was not capable of handling the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen backed opposition without outside assistance (45:20-21) and the Shah said Iran was protecting the security of the Strait of Hormuz against aggression and subversion (1:94). Iran's action had at least quiet approval from the Gulf Arabs, however, in the absence of direct Arab support to Oman (1:94).

Iranian foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf under the Shah was consistent with that of Iran's other strong leaders throughout the centuries. The Shah believed Iran was destined to play an active and leading role in the Gulf. These same beliefs of Iranian greatness were carried into the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Khomeini And The Persian Gulf

Iranian foreign policy today toward the Gulf is not only aggressive as the Shah's imperial policy, but more threatening because Iran hopes to export its revolution. Iraq's Saddam Hussein has portrayed the war against Iran as the defense of the Arabs against the "racist Persians" (35:68).

Iran has threatened and attacked Gulf countries that support Iraq. During October 1981 and December 1983, Iran conducted airstrikes on Kuwait. In December 1981, an Iranian inspired coup attempt failed in Bahrain. During 1984, the Iran-Iraq War escalated in the Gulf with Iraqi and Iranian attacks on oil tankers and with a Saudi F-15 downing an Iranian F-4 over Saudi territorial waters. Lastly, Iran continues to threaten to close the Strait of Hormuz if Iraq destroys Iran's capability to export oil. Iranian policy toward the Gulf is obviously influenced by, and a reaction to, events in the war, but it is also the result of the Islamic Republic's revolutionary ideology--which is incorporated into its 1979 constitution.

Article 1 of Iran's constitution identifies the form of government as an Islamic Republic, led by Imam Khomeini. The constitution also calls for the Islamic Republic as duty bound to formulate its general policies toward the merging and union of all Muslim peoples. It recognizes that all Muslims form a single nation and Iran must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world (Article 10). In addition, while it claims to reject all forms of aggressive intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, it says Iran has the obligation to bring independence, freedom, and just government to the oppressed and deprived in the world (Article 154). In fact, Khomeini said as early as 1970 in a lecture (later included in his book Islamic Government) that, "We have in reality, then, no choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others, and to overthrow all treacherous, corrupt, oppressive, and criminal regimes" (17:48). After six years of existence as an Islamic republic, Iranian goals have become more clear.

Iran's doctrine for exporting its revolution is based on three interconnected foreign policy goals. The first is to ultimately see the eventual establishment of an Islamic world government. The second goal is near term--to promote populist, independent Islamic governments. Iran wants to see governments ruled by anti-monarchical, pro-Iranian religious leaders, who conduct an anti-Western and anti-Soviet Islamic foreign policy. The third goal is to protect Iran as the first (and at present the only) Islamic republic in the world (36:6). Iran does have some peaceful means, however, for use in exporting its revolution.

Khomeini uses five broad options to peacefully export the revolution. First, he urges Iranians in general, and Iranian diplomats in particular, to observe "Islamic ethics" for their personal conduct. Khomeini expects all Iranians to set the example for proper Islamic behavior. Second, he emphasizes the effective use of revolutionary propaganda. Friday prayer sermons, printed material, and tape recordings are effective instruments for Islamic indoctrination within Iran and other countries. Third, Khomeini attempts to proselytize foreign religious leaders (ulama), who come to Iran individually and as members of Iranian organized and hosted international congresses. Fourth, Khomeini attempts to export the revolution by using the pilgrimage to Mecca. The thousands of Iranian pilgrims who make the Hajj each year have the opportunity to discuss Khomeini's thoughts on Islam with some two million Muslims from around the world. Lastly, Iran hosts the headquarters of many terrorist and revolutionary groups from around the world. Iran is able to provide religious (ideological) indoctrination, training, and money to the various groups (36:7).

Although no Gulf country appears close to adopting an Iranian styled government, Iran will continue to claim its struggle is pan-Islamic. Iran will continue to preach to the poor and less educated that it is leading in the Islamic struggle against imperialist, Zionist, and repressive (non-Islamic) regimes. For example, Khomeini claims divisions between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims is an imperialist strategy of dividing Muslims from one another (17:304). At the same time, Iran will continue its historic territorial disputes. This last factor should not be underestimated. For example, despite its rhetoric Iran has not renamed the Persian Gulf to the Islamic Gulf.

CONCLUSIONS

Iranian foreign policy toward the Gulf under the Shah and Khomeini has been an aggressive one against its neighbors. The Shah believed he had a historic right to regain Gulf territories dating from the Sassanians and Khomeini believes Iran's Islamic Republic is the model for eventually merging and uniting all Muslim peoples into a single Islamic nation. The Shah used Iran's oil wealth and US supplied weaponry to serve as the Gulf's protector. Iranian justification for occupying the islands of Abu Musa and the two Tunbs was based on historic rights and necessary to better protect access to the Gulf. The Islamic Republic continues to occupy the islands and reminds the world it retains de facto control of the Strait of Hormuz each time Iran threatens to close the strait. In Bahrain, the Shah used diplomatic means in an unsuccessful attempt to merge it with Iran at the time of Bahrain's independence. The Islamic Republic tried to reestablish control of Bahrain (which has a 60 percent Shi'a majority) in an unsuccessful coup attempt. Lastly, the dispute between Iran and Iraq over their common boundary along the Shatt al-Arab continues today in open warfare.

Iran under the Shah was aggressive but Khomeini's policy is more threatening because it has added religion to its rationale for policy implementation. Incorporating concepts for uniting all Muslims into its constitution serves as a clear reminder to Gulf Arab leaders that Iran is

trying to legitimize a former historically based foreign policy into one that is now based on Islamic revolution. Thus, Gulf Arab leaders will not be threatened by only the Khomeini regime but also by a like-minded successor regime which will continue to implement the now established principles of the Iranian Islamic Republic.

Chapter Three

IRANIAN ELITE GROUPS AND FOREIGN POLICY

ELITES IN IRAN

Defining Iranian Elites

Iran's traditional elites, who were associated with dynastic rule, have changed as a result of Iran's 1978-79 revolution. Power is now maintained by one elite group--the Iranian ulama (clergy), under the guidance of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini does not, however, run the day-to-day affairs of government but provides advice and holds veto power over the clergy. These individuals are now the Iranian political elite, or those Iranians who persistently exercise power over large numbers of people with regard to the allocation of highly prized values in the national political system--to include formulating and implementing foreign policy (24:7).

The royal family, military commanders, and trusted personal companions in the government bureaucracy (dating to the Achaemenids) have traditionally comprised Iran's political elite (24:119). The political elite has been so influential and powerful that the government of Iran historically has been "of, by, and for the elite" (24:133). But until the revolution, the clergy was not part of the ruling elite. For example, the Shah's government made a concerted and determined effort to deny political elite status to Iran's ayatollahs and only Khomeini had national prominence (24:193). This is not to imply, however, that the clergy throughout Iran's Islamic history has not had elite status and influence. Marvin Zonis identifies Iran's principal religious leaders as one of the most influential of thirty elite groups (24:347) but until now these individuals have never controlled Iran's government. As a result, because the ulama does not have a past record of direct rule, this chapter will attempt to identify its positions on foreign policy issues based on ideological differences within the elite group.

The Ulama Elite

We still know very little about the Iranian religious institution since they have never exercised such great power as they do today (2:181). We do know, however, that although Iran's ulama have all operated within a broad consensus of Shi'a religious thought, they have expressed thoughts, needs, and interests which have differed (2:185).

Although there is conflict among the Iranian clergy, it is unlikely they will lose their position of power after Khomeini. The demise of mullahcracy

(as many Iranians in exile claim) is probably nostalgic, wishful thinking (7:32). The wealthy, educated, Western-oriented, and upper middle class have fled Iran. Shi'a religious institutions penetrate all levels of society and the clergy still commands mass support among the vast majority of the population (7:31-32). This does not mean, however, that there will not be an intense power struggle after Khomeini. The Islamic Republic has not yet proved its capability for institutional continuity and peaceful transition of power and the ruling elites will compete for positions (13:16).

Although it is anticipated that the Iranian clergy will retain power, less clear is which faction of the ulama will have the dominant influence on Iranian decision making. The one issue the clergy is united on is dedication to the propagation of Shi'a Islam in the society (27:35). But the clergy is factionalized on foreign policy issues, such as export of Islamic revolution to other Muslim countries, continuation of the war with Iraq, and relations with the United States and Soviet Union (13:1). In addition, there is also factional disagreement on domestic issues, such as the principle of leadership in the government known as the "government of the jurisprudent" (Velayat-e Faqih), private property, and trade. James Bill described the major factional alignments as political extremists, political moderates, and political pragmatists (27:36-40). Gregory Rose has categorized roughly the same groups as Maktabi, Hojjatiyyeh, and Ulama-ye Mujahidin, respectively (14:45-52). Rose makes it clear, however, that neither the factions named, their ideological positions, nor their membership is as clear cut as a schematic listing might make it appear (14:45). But there is enough information to provide the factions' ideological differences on broad policy issues, such as relations with the Gulf states, the Iran-Iraq War, and relations with the United States and Soviet Union.

The Maktabi (or political extremist) group has been clearly dominant in the Iranian government and the Islamic Republican Party since September 1981 (14:45). As a result, Iran's involvement in the Bahraini coup attempt, attacks on Kuwait, continuation of the war with Iraq, and support to "liberation groups" (to include those outside the Gulf) are indicative of Maktabi policies. They follow Khomeini's line and are best defined as inflexible, hard-line, and profoundly conservative on most social and political issues. Positions are taken based upon strong ideological convictions. Some of Iran's most dominant elites who advocate these positions are (13:3; 14:54-55):

Ali Hussein Khamenei: president of the Republic

Muhammad Reza Mahdavi Kani: chairman, Society of Combatants

Hosain Ali Montazeri: head of the Secretariat, Friday Mosque Prayer Leader; named successor to Khomeini

Abd al-Karim Musavi Ardabili: president, Supreme Court

Mohammad Rayshahri: Minister of Information and Intelligence

Ali Meshkini: Friday Mosque Prayer Leader, Qom

As a group, they advocate export (through propaganda, material assistance, and armed force) of its Islamic revolution to the rest of the Muslim world (Shi'a and Sunni) as the lynchpin of Iranian foreign policy. They provide aid to a wide variety of groups throughout the Gulf region--and also to

non-Islamic groups throughout the world. In addition, they advocate continuation of the war with Iraq and have been unwilling to negotiate an end until the Ba'athist regime is replaced by an Islamic republic. (Three additional Iranian demands--the withdrawal of Iraqi troops in Iran, international condemnation of Iraqi aggression, and payment of reparations--could be negotiated with Iraq as a face-saving measure by both countries). Finally, they view the United States as the Islamic Republic's principal enemy and the Soviet Union as almost as hostile (14:47). For example, the Iranian government has consistently been critical of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and of supplying weapons to Iraq.

The Hojjatiyyeh (or political moderates) were the dominant faction prior to the summer of 1981 (14:49). Headed by Mohammed Beheshti (who died June 1981), the group is comparatively more flexible and open with respect to social and political matters (27:37). Other moderates include Nasser Makarem Shirazi and Ali Golzadeh Ghaffuri. Unfortunately, because of a lack of data on this group they are identifiable only in terms of opposition to Maktabi positions (14:49). For example, they are more flexible in the area of foreign policy in that they do not demand the removal of Iraq's Ba'athist regime as a condition for peace because they regard it as an unlikely eventuality. They also appear to de-emphasize the rhetoric of export of the revolution and oppose giving aid to outside groups. This implies, for example, that they would oppose future coup attempts in the region on the sole basis of ideology. Their position on the United States is consistent with the political extremists. It differs, however, on the Soviet Union in that they tend to advocate closer relations to counterbalance Iran's isolation by the West (14:50).

The Ulama-ye Mujahidin (or political pragmatists) is the third major faction. This group is made of individuals with diverse ideologies and has no single identifiable position on foreign policy issues to consider in this analysis. Headed by Majlis speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, most in this group did not significantly participate in the anti-Shah struggle prior to September 1978 (14:50). Rafsanjani, for example, was in prison at the time because of his opposition to the Shah. This group is diverse in that it is made of individuals who seek to retain and expand their social influence and power by reflecting the views of the dominant ruling faction. This is the course adopted by Rafsanjani (a former student of Khomeini's) and has been effective in that he has developed stronger regional organizational ties than President Khamenei (13:9). A second type of political pragmatist includes the elderly first rank mujtahids (such as Mohammad Reza Golpaygani and Hasan Tabatabai Qummi) who oppose Khomeini's concept of an Islamic republic. They would prefer to revert to the traditional role of providing a general oversight over the state. Most of these individuals, however, have more or less cooperated with the regime and have remained disengaged and aloof from political affairs (13:6; 27:38; 14:51). The ultimate question, however, is who will succeed Khomeini and what will be Iran's foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf.

SUCCESSION TO KHOMEINI AND POLICY GOALS

As early as 1982, Hosain Ali Montazeri was rumored to be Khomeini's chosen successor. On 23 November 1985, Iran's Council of Experts (an 83-member body authorized by Iran's constitution to select Khomeini's successor) named Montazeri as his heir apparent--probably to help insure a smooth transition of power. Montazeri is not credited, however, as having Khomeini's intelligence, popular appeal, and political acumen (39:915). In other words, although he has been given the honorific title of Grand Ayatollah, not all of Iran's other senior mujahids are likely to support his accession as the Velayat-e Faqih because they believe Montazeri is unqualified for the title or because they do not favor the Velayat-e Faqih precepts. Khomeini's successor regime will need support, however, from at least some of the key Friday Mosque Prayer Leaders (Khomeini's appointees who lead the Friday prayer and deliver political sermons) who are in a position to mobilize the populace in the large urban areas, the local Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards), and the revolutionary committees (13:6-7). Montazeri's advantages are that he has regular contact with Iran's religious elite, he has the support of powerful individuals in the present regime (such as Rafsanjani and Khamenei), and that Iran has traditionally recognized one strong leader. If Montazeri is not strong enough to govern alone, however, then the constitution calls for collective rule by three or five clerics.

There are several politically powerful ulama who collectively could succeed Khomeini. For example, Shahrough Akhavi's succession scenario identifies six top contenders (13:8): Montazeri, President Khamenei, Majlis speaker Rafsanjani, Qom Friday Mosque Prayer Leader Meshkini, Supreme Court Chief Justice Ardabili, and State Prosecutor General Sanei. Although this may not be the total list of possible successors, it is at least representative of the future elites who will make and implement foreign policy.

Iran's political ruling elite support Khomeini's foreign policy on the broad issues. In addition, the above six contenders for power are identified with political extremist alignment. This would tend to indicate they will continue Khomeini's approach to policy. It is not known, however, if any or all of these individuals are as firmly committed as Khomeini to his ideological principles or if they will be forced to modify their positions (such as on the removal of Iraq's Ba'athist regime to end the war) as they try to build a power base among the other influential clerics. Another possibility is that individuals currently involved in the daily implementation of foreign policy will gain influence. For example, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati is considered a political moderate (14:54) and may be influential in arguing for a negotiated settlement to the Iran-Iraq War. But, because of historical and ideological enculturation and influences, some concluding observations can be made concerning Iran's future role in the Persian Gulf.

CONCLUSIONS

Iran's political extremist faction is most likely to continue to dominate the government. As a result, Iran's foreign policy toward the Persian Gulf is likely to remain an active one. Iran had an active imperial policy and it continues to be so under the Islamic Republic. Exporting the Iranian Revolution throughout the Gulf will remain the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy. There is little cause to believe the new regime will significantly reduce its propaganda or economic and military assistance to the "liberation groups" active in the Gulf. There will continue to be members of the government, however, who believe Iran should maintain good relations with existing governments in order to be in a position to convey peacefully the message of "the great Islamic revival" that is taking place in Iran (29:9). Less clear, will be Iran's policy for continuing the war with Iraq.

If the political extremists dominate, the new government will probably remain unwilling to accept a negotiated settlement to the war until Iran's present conditions are met. Although there is a strong desire by a large portion of the Iranian population to see the war end, this view has not been expressed by the majority of the political elites most likely to attain power. For example, both Rafsanjani and Khamenei still believe (and have said so in public and private) that they fear a failure to achieve military victory of Iraq may lead to the crumbling of the Islamic regime (28:9). Any softening on the war will more likely be the result of a further deterioration of Iran's economic and military situation--a point Iran clearly has not reached, as evidenced by the lack of resolve to negotiate. Finally, the new government will also want to ensure the Army remains occupied along Iraq's border. Even if there will not be the desire for any large offensives, Iran will continue the present war of attrition while the new regime consolidates its power. Relations with the two superpowers are also not likely to change in the near-term.

Iran has experienced brief Soviet occupation and, most recently, it has been ruled by "America's Shah" (25:53). Since both the political extremists and moderates see the US as the principal enemy of the Islamic Republic, there is no reason to be optimistic that relations will improve. In addition, it is unlikely there will be improved relations with the Soviet Union--at least as long as the Soviets continue to occupy Afghanistan and remain Iraq's major arms supplier. In March 1980 Khomeini said, "Be fully aware that the danger represented by the communist powers is no less than that of America . . . both superpowers are intent on destroying the oppressed nations of the world and it is our duty to defend those nations" (17:286). The Soviets have an advantage over the US, however, in that they are not associated with the Shah's regime and the political moderates are more inclined to recommend improved relations with the Soviets to counterbalance Iran's isolation with the US and its allies (14:50). The degree of success Iran will be able to attain in its goals will be influenced by many internal and external constraints.

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Chapter Four

CONSTRAINTS ON IRAN'S POLICY IN THE GULF

For the reasons given in the previous chapters, Iran will retain an active foreign policy after Khomeini dies. The degree of success Iran attains in accomplishing its policy goals, and the overall security of the Persian Gulf region in general, will depend on related and overlapping internal and external constraints: Iranian political and economic constraints, Iranian-Arab relations, the Iran-Iraq War, Gulf oil export, intra-Arab relations, and the role of the United States.

IRANIAN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

Regime Opposition

The clergy appears to have consolidated its hold on the government and gained control over the opposition elements. The most likely contenders for power (the Pahlavi family and the military) are not in a position to challenge the ulama. Surviving members of Iran's traditional power elite, who now support Reza Shah II, are for the most part not living in Iran. As a result, they are not in a position to directly challenge the government. The military has been transformed because following the 1978-79 revolution it was purged of up to half of the officer corps considered influential and too pro-Shah (12:17). In addition, the officer corps has been further weakened by six years of war and by the recruitment of young and aggressive individuals who support the Islamic Republic. There are, however, other major contenders for power.

"The major opponents of the Islamic Republic can be divided into four groups: the Marxist-Leninists, the Royalists, the liberal-left elements, and the People's Mujaheddin Organization of Iran (PMOI)" (13:17). The scope of this paper does not allow for an analysis of these groups, but at least for the present, none are in a position to challenge the regime. For example, the PMOI has created a professional revolutionary apparatus abroad and has the best network of cadres and militias inside the country but is too weak to challenge the government at this time (14:197; 13:22). In addition, former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan heads the only legal opposition in Iran--The Movement for Freedom of Iran. Bazargan was disqualified from running in the 1985 presidential elections, however, because President Carter's memoirs included a reference to secret contacts made by Bazargan with the United States after the revolution (32:46). The strongest challenge to clergy rule

could come from within one of its own sources of power--the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards).

The Revolutionary Guards may ultimately determine if the Islamic Republic will have a peaceful transition of power. Although the Guards are united in a government ministry, they have been traditionally broken down into small independent factions aligned to individual clerics. What is unknown is if the Revolutionary Guards will support one successor to Khomeini or if they will split in open conflict, backing several competing clerics. What is clear, however, is that any individual or group hoping to overthrow the newly established government will need disciplined cadres, mass support, militant fighters, and plenty of guns (13:16). Thus, if the ruling clerics do not act within the framework of the Iranian Constitution for a peaceful transfer of power, factional civil war could open the possibility for one of several rival groups to come to power.

Economic Constraints

Iran's most costly foreign policy (in economic and human terms) is the war with Iraq. There is no doubt that Iran has suffered as a result of the war. About half of Iran's export earnings are used to finance the war and more than 3,000 Iranian factories and much of its oil producing industry has been destroyed or damaged. This has led to a situation where Iran's industry has been running at less than 50 percent of capacity (32:3). The amount of Iran's actual foreign exchange reserves and foreign debt is not clear. The Central Bank of Iran claims the country has foreign exchange reserves of \$13 billion, while Western sources believe the reserves have been wiped out as a result of overspending in 1983 and early 1984 (33:4). Although both estimates are probably exaggerating the situation, Iran's economic plight obviously has not forced a negotiated settlement to the war. Iraqi attacks on tankers and Iran's main oil terminal at Kharg Island has not caused Iran economic strangulation and may have only served to sometimes strengthen the social cohesion of Iran's masses. The economic situation, however, has caused domestic political problems.

Political Constraints

On 29 January 1985, Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Qasim issued an anti-war fatwas (religious opinion) declaring that such a war among Muslims was prohibited and must be terminated. In March Iran suffered another failed major offensive in the Hawizah Marshes; in April there was a major anti-war protest in the poor south Tehran district of Hohom Aban during which some demonstrators were killed and wounded and some 300 arrested (40:10). The war continues, however, because the legitimacy of clergy rule has been tied to the successful outcome of Iran's stated war aims. As said in the previous chapter, Iran's leading political elites are tied to the war policy and fear the political consequences of a settlement based on compromise. The great majority of Iran's population has adjusted to the problems caused by the war and a new regime may feel there is more to potentially lose by its immediate end than by at least a limited continuation. The new government will also most likely want to keep the Iranian military occupied along the border while it consolidates power. The new leadership will be cautious, however, in its

approach to the war because even Khomeini recognizes that there is discontent among senior clergy members in the government. After the April protests Khomeini said in Qom, "If, God forbid, there is a conflict between the seminary associations and the cabinet, or between the associations and the Majlis, or even between the Majlis and the cabinet, then we will suffer defeat" (41:26). As a result, domestic, economic, and political constraints are present but they do not appear to be beyond the control of the Islamic Republic.

If there is conflict among the clergy, foreign policy could become constrained if the political elites can not unite behind a strong central leadership. If the new government is headed by a 3- or 5-man coalition, there might not be the strong central leadership that has historically led Iran to its greatest heights. Thus, the largest domestic constraint on an aggressive foreign policy may come from the lack of a single, strong, and charismatic leader after Khomeini. Otherwise, Iran will most likely have to be constrained by external means.

EXTERNAL POLICY CONSTRAINTS

Iranian-Arab Relations

Iran's present and future foreign policy could be constrained by several external conditions. First is the lack of ideological support from the other Gulf regimes. Although there are large Shi'a populations in several Gulf countries, the majority of the people, and all of the leaders, are Sunni Moslems and bear no ideological allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini. Incidents such as the 1979 siege of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca; the 1981 coup attempt in Bahrain; and 1981 air attacks, 1983 embassy bombings, and an assassination plot against the Emir of Kuwait are examples of events that have provided the impetus for the Gulf states to try to isolate Iran, while at the same time maintaining diplomatic dialogue. For example, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal visited Tehran in May 1985 and said upon his arrival that the Iranian Revolution was a reality and that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intended to establish positive relations with Iran. Tehran considered the visit a success and felt it would lead to more positive diplomatic and political relations between the two countries (32:47). Because of the ideological differences between Iran and the Gulf Arabs, and because of their economic and political support for Iraq, Iran feels the Gulf Arab regimes are determined to overturn the Islamic Republic. For example, Iran is convinced that Iraq attacked in September 1980 with the full knowledge and support of the Saudis, who saw an opportunity to destroy the revolution (5:396).

The Iran-Iraq War

The second possible constraint has already been discussed--the ongoing war with Iraq. Although the new regime may at least actively (if not aggressively) continue the war for domestic reasons, its associated economic and political costs will constrain other policy goals. Despite the number of increased diplomatic exchanges among Iran and the Gulf Arabs, it is difficult for Iranian rhetoric to convince them that Iran desires regional peace. The

Gulf Arabs will continue to look at Iran's policy as Shi'a Islamic and anti-Arab so long as the destruction of Iraq's regime remains an unconditional demand for ending the war.

Gulf Oil Export

A third constraint is Iran's dependence on revenue from oil. On 19 September 1985, Iraq made its most devastating attack on Kharg Island by hitting the main oil-loading jetty (30:7). Since 90 percent of Iran's income is derived from oil, its leadership must consider this fact during policy formulation. In addition, Iran is just as dependent as the other Gulf countries for access to the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian threats to close the strait if Iraq is successful in cutting off Iran's oil exports, however, should not be ignored. If Iraq succeeds in destroying Iran's main oil terminal on Kharg, then Iran will have little economic incentive to leave the strait open. An Iranian attempt may only be temporary, however, because Iran's Navy is not considered capable of closing it by either blockade or mines because of its deteriorated status and because the strait is too broad and deep to mine (30:7). But at least to date, Iraq's attacks on Kharg Island and ships along Iran's coast have not had their desired effect on forcing Iran to end the war through economic strangulation and the war has remained contained.

Intra-Arab Relations

The 1981 formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) poses another constraint on Iranian foreign policy. The GCC may be the most significant regional contribution to the deceleration of Iran's goal of exporting its revolution (25:56). On 4 February 1981, the foreign ministers of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait met in Riyadh to draw up the organization structure. Their stated reason was,

"... in recognition of the special relations, common characteristics, and similar institutions that link these states, and due to the importance of establishing strong coordination and integration in all spheres including various economic and social fields" (43:5).

Despite the initial and ongoing emphasis on the economic and social aspects of the council, security concerns quickly occupied its priorities as a result of the Iran-Iraq War (7:84). This led to GCC efforts to exchange intelligence, integrate air defense systems, and the establishment of a Gulf joint rapid deployment force--in order to counter external threats and to quickly stop any internal uprising (34:15). Its capabilities should continue to improve and serve as an increased deterrent to Iranian aggression. A final possible constraint on Iranian foreign policy is the United States' presence in the region.

The United States' Role

The establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force in December 1979, and the January 1980 Carter Doctrine, signaled to Iran (and the Soviet Union) that the

United States was determined to protect its vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The Gulf states, however, were highly suspicious of US intentions and charged that the Carter Doctrine was a pretext for intervention into the area (7:101). This perception has been reduced over the last few years, but the moderate Arab regimes must still limit more overt cooperation with the US for the principal domestic reasons of US support for Israel and concern that it could bring into the area an increased Soviet military presence (42:3; 7:94). As a result, an "over the horizon" US presence is probably the most realistic option. It is also a useful one in adding to the regional deterrence of reducing increased Iranian aggression--such as an attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz or an attack on a GCC member state.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Iran faces several constraints to its foreign policy goals in the Gulf region. In an effort to consolidate its power, the new regime will need to ensure the ulama does not break into squabbling factional groups which would provide an opportunity for one of the major opposition elements to effectively challenge the government. Since it appears Khomeini will be succeeded by clerics who hold ideological views similar to his own, it does not appear likely that there will be an immediate change to foreign policy goals. The leadership is likely to continue to follow the present policy goals so that they do not antagonize the circle of elites that have occupied Iran's positions of power and influence under Khomeini. In addition, if Montazeri (as Khomeini's chosen successor) can consolidate enough power to provide strong central leadership, the present nature of external constraints should not have an adverse effect on policy. On the other hand, a clergy coalition government is more likely to be distracted by trying to prevent factional conflict and be less able to develop a consensus for foreign policy. Future Iranian policy goals could also become more constrained by increased external problems. For example, lost revenue from declining oil prices, a crippling Iraqi attack on Kharg Island, or the continued strengthening of the Gulf Cooperation Council could individually, or collectively, hinder Iranian policy. At the same time, however, events since the Iranian Revolution have demonstrated that Iran does not always act in a rational "Western" manner. Thus, the element of doubt in forecasting Iranian foreign policy will remain.

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Chapter Five

IMPLICATIONS OF IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE GULF AND CONCLUSIONS

The Iranian Revolution created regional instability for the Gulf states and the United States. Iran's goal of replacing the Gulf regimes with Islamist ones places stress on these governments because of concern about the loyalty of their internal Shi'a populations. United States' interests and relations have been affected because Iran has depicted the Gulf regimes as "puppets" and "pygmies" of the "Satanic schemes" of the United States. As a result, the Gulf states have been kept on the defensive in terms of their policy toward the US since military overtures are branded as a sellout and anti-Islamic (25:52).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GULF STATES

The Islamic Republic has changed the nature of traditional regional conflict between Iran and the Gulf Arabs. The Shah's territorial ambitions were based on a desire to renew some of Iran's pre-Islamic greatness. For example, he rationalized occupying Arab territory in historic terms as necessary for Iran to meet its perceived role as protector for the Gulf region as a whole. But the Shah did not try to challenge the rule of Iran's neighbors--to include Bahrain at independence. The Islamic Republic's territorial ambitions, however, are part of a much broader ideologically based desire to unite all Muslim peoples. The Islamic Republic's stated goal to impose Iranian-styled Islamic government on the Gulf regimes challenges their legitimacy to rule. As a result, Iranian foreign policy has served as a catalyst for closer Gulf state relations--such as formation of the GCC. In addition, the December 1981 Iranian-backed coup attempt in Bahrain also served to bring the conservative Gulf states closer to Iraq out of fear of the Iranian ideological and religious threat to their political legitimacy (1:199).

The continuation of the Iran-Iraq War has helped contain Iranian aggression, but there could be increased problems once the war ends. Both Iran and Iraq (both powerful and revolutionary nations) will be in a better position to promote their respective interests and ideologies in the region (5:401). Neither country, for example, desires to see a strong military association among the GCC members. Thus, strengthening the military ties within the GCC will probably become an even more important deterrent of regional aggression in the future. Confining Iranian aggression (and the war) will also continue to pose serious problems for the United States.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

United States' interests in the Persian Gulf are regional and global. Regional interests include the continued stability of the moderate Arab regimes and continued access to oil for the Western world. As a result, instability in any country in the region becomes a factor in global politics (44:6). Of concern to the US is that heightened conflict could lead to a greater Soviet presence. This could come about if the Soviets feel their regional interests are threatened, at the request of Iraq if Iran were to make increased military gains, or from an Iranian request to counter actual or perceived threats from the Western governments.

United States' policy toward Iran reflects two conflicting interests--the maintenance of the territorial cohesion of Iran and the discouragement of the revolutionary regime's expansion into the other Gulf states (31:711). There is little reason to believe these conflicting policy concerns will diminish for the US after Khomeini. It is unlikely US-Iranian relations will improve or that Iran will reduce its aggressive policy in the region. As a result, the United States and the Gulf states face a continuation of many of the same challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

Iran will continue to challenge Gulf states' and United States' interests after Khomeini. Iranian hegemony and conflict with the Arabs is already centuries old. The leaders of the Islamic Republic may share some of the same perceptions of Iran's past greatness as the Shah, but Gulf conflict is now centered on the goal to impose a single Muslim nation.

The possibility of the Iranian clergy losing power after Khomeini appears remote. The clergy elite is at least united in the belief that if they lose power now, that they will have no place to go. Khomeini's influence and teachings are incorporated into the 1979 Iranian Constitution and daily life. The major opposition elements capable of challenging the government have been eliminated, exiled, or coopted. In addition, the strongest and most likely clergy faction to succeed Khomeini (to include heir-apparent Hosain Ali Montazeri) are his closest supporters and among Iran's most radical. The element of doubt remains, however, if Montazeri can form a strong enough following to rule alone or if Iran will have a collective leadership.

The makeup of Iran's successor regime will determine how aggressive and active Iranian policy will be in the Gulf region. First, Iranian influence in the Gulf has been greatest when Iran was ruled by a single strong leader. Second, a collective leadership is less likely to form a consensus on policy issues which are based to a large extent on ideology--such as Iran's present conditions for ending the war with Iraq. If the clergy does not unite behind Montazeri, then the Iranian political situation may provide the most effective constraint on developing and implementing policy goals.

A strong and united political, economic, and military effort by the Gulf states can also serve as a deterrent to constrain Iran. A continued

strengthening of the Gulf Cooperation Council appears to offer the most credible regional deterrent to Iranian aggression. Even after the war with Iraq ends, it would be difficult for Iran to militarily confront a collective defense. In addition, Iran is also as dependent as the Gulf Arabs are on maintaining the ability to export oil--which is necessary for rebuilding the Iranian economy.

Finally, the continued "over the horizon" United States' presence is an important deterrent. There is little reason to believe that US-Iranian relations will significantly improve after Khomeini. The clergy seems united in blaming the US for Iran's former and present problems. Iran's knowledge, however, that the US has a military capability near to the region and has the political will to use its military power is not likely to be ignored by the Iranian government. But, throughout history the Persian Gulf region has had periods of turbulence. Iran will continue to exploit its perceived position of power and influence in the region if given the opportunity.

NO PRINT

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